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And put it in its place with care

Shelley

Form

11





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# **ROSALIND AND HELEN**

**A LECTURE**



# ROSALIND AND HELEN

A LECTURE

BY

HARRY BUXTON FORMAN

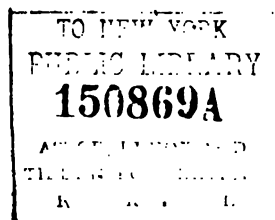


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## ROSALIND AND HELEN,

*A Lecture delivered to the Shelley Society on the 13th of  
June 1888,*

BY H. BUXTON FORMAN.

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—In bringing before you the subject of Shelley's long minor poem *Rosalind and Helen*, I have again to ask your indulgence for selecting a theme which must give more or less of a desultory character to our evening's proceedings. It has not yet been my fortune to address you upon one of Shelley's efforts of the first order. Leaving to abler hands the exposition of such supreme works as *Prometheus Unbound*, *Epipsychidion*, and *The Triumph of Life*, I have contented myself as best I might with the less ambitious topics of *Queen Mab*, *The Mask of Anarchy*, and *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote*,—topics which have been not so much those of my choice as those towards which necessary work for our Society has directed my steps. Again this evening, as Mr. Wise can assure you, our subject is one to which my attention has had to be given for another purpose. As you already know, a friend who chooses to be unnamed and unknown, offered to present to his fellow members of the Shelley Society a reprint of one of the poet's volumes if I would undertake to edit it. Various circumstances combined to direct the choice to the volume issued in 1819 containing *Rosalind and Helen*, the *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, the *Hymn*

to *Intellectual Beauty*, and the sonnet entitled *Ozymandias*. The preparation of the reprint naturally leads to a few reflexions on the poetical contents of the original volume, and more particularly on that eclogue which occupies sixty-eight of the ninety-two pages composing the book, and which gives the volume its title. Hence, when your secretary, Mr. Wise, in that peremptory mood which characterizes all his Shelley Society doings, told me that he had put me down for a paper this session, and that I must contribute one whether I could or not, there was nothing left me to do,—short, that is to say, of a breach of discipline,—but to undertake the occupation of an evening with *Rosalind and Helen*, as a poem which it was necessary for me in any case to study afresh.

After all, if I can but keep you entertained for the evening or suggest to other members the means of keeping you entertained by discussion of our subject, I need not regret the choice. In the first place, if you will not deem it fantastic, I shall ask you to believe that, no sooner did I take up again that poem of which Shelley himself spoke or wrote so slightly, than I found myself once more in the characteristic atmosphere of reform,—in a position, that is to say, to read in the life and works of our poet one more chapter in the history of reform, which would be the fourth chapter, however desultory and remote from concrete politics, that you and I, ladies and gentlemen, have been led by circumstance to read together. And in the second place this necessary re-perusal of an old favourite revives a well-worn impression that *Rosalind and Helen*, though disjointed and inconsistent in execution, is quite unusually replete with passages in a high degree beautiful and characteristic.

Shelley knew only too well how imperfect was his own work,—how imperfect was all human work, when judged by the elevated standard which he set up for himself and future aspirants to the poetic priesthood to follow; and his almost contemptuous attitude towards this particular child of his swift and splendid imagination is not difficult to understand. Yet I cannot bring myself to admit *Rosalind and Helen* to quite so low a

place as he would seem to have assigned to it. Before attempting to examine the poem and the circumstances of its composition, let us look at what its author said about it. In the "Advertisement" prefixed to his own edition he frankly damns it with the faintest praise.

"The story of 'Rosalind and Helen' is," he says, "undoubtedly, not an attempt in the highest style of poetry. It is in no degree calculated to excite profound meditation; and if, by interesting the affections and amusing the imagination, it awaken a certain ideal melancholy favourable to the reception of more important impressions, it will produce in the reader all that the writer experienced in the composition. I resigned myself, as I wrote, to the impulse of the feelings which moulded the conception of the story; and this impulse determined the pauses of a measure, which only pretends to be regular inasmuch as it corresponds with, and expresses, the irregularity of the imaginations which inspired it."

By Mrs. Shelley we are told that *Rosalind and Helen* was begun at Marlow and thrown aside until she found it in Italy, when Shelley, at her request, finished it at the Baths of Lucca in the summer of 1818. When he had finished it, and Mrs. Shelley had transcribed it for press, he wrote to Peacock of it that its structure was "slight and æry, its subject ideal,"—adding in a later letter, "I lay no stress on it one way or the other. The concluding lines are natural."

Now the essential statement in all this is that the creation of *Rosalind and Helen* did no more than awaken in Shelley "a certain ideal melancholy favourable to the reception of more important impressions." To my apprehension it seems that the poem is properly to be regarded as a solid result of moral speculation rather than an exercise,—the outcome of impressions decidedly more important than any which can fairly be described by the term "ideal melancholy"; and what Shelley either forgets or modestly ignores is that those more important themes are there in the poem in such a form as to take effect at once on that receptiveness of the reader which he regards as the only probable result of his poem. Let us look first at the story: who are

Rosalind and Helen, and what have their lives produced for them at the time of their conversation forming the staple fabric of the poem ?

Rosalind and Helen are two young mothers at the time of their introduction to us, seemingly both of English middle-class birth, though of Helen's parents nothing is said. Rosalind, living with her mother, in her father's absence from England, has formed an attachment for a young man, who is about to marry her. When the pair are already at the altar her father suddenly appears from abroad, and forbids the banns on the ground that the bridegroom is his son by another mother than Rosalind's. The youth falls dead, but Rosalind lives on in self-contained misery. Her father dies leaving his wife and daughter unprovided for ; and Rosalind in sheer despair, and for her mother's sake, marries a man whom she positively loathes in the sequel, if not from the first. She has three children, all of whom fear their father like the plague. He in turn dies, leaving a will under which his widow is abominably traduced, and his children only provided for on condition of absolute separation from their mother. Rosalind accepts the position of a childless outcast rather than expose her offspring to the horrors of poverty.

With a good deal of the fierce resolve of a martyr, Rosalind from first to last has been the slave of conventional duty. Not so Helen, who loves, from Rosalind's point of view "not wisely but too well," Lionel, a youth of noble birth, amiable character, great personal attractions, and revolutionary humanitarian sentiments and convictions. Rosalind, apparently at a time anterior to her own dire misfortunes, considers Helen's relations with Lionel sufficient cause for breaking with her friend. Lionel throws himself as orator and pamphleteer into the ferment of agitation against political, social, and priestly tyranny ; and, when the popular hope dies for the moment, and tyranny and superstition are triumphantly consolidated in power, the frustrated spirit of freedom within him drives him forth to wander in far lands, away from Helen, and not unsuspected of seeking solace in strange loves. After three years he returns, desolate, and renews his intercourse with Helen, under

whose influence his spirit has a second birth of faith, hope, and power to agitate, while his bodily health begins to fail. Although Helen's account is a trifle vague, there seems to me to be no doubt that, during this spiritual revival, Lionel was conducting a second courtship of Helen, the end of which is that she consents to a second union with him of the same unconventional character as the first. No sooner is this matter settled than Lionel is arrested on a charge of uttering a blasphemous and seditious libel of and concerning Almighty God and of and concerning the Holy Scriptures,—to translate into the jargon of the contemporary law-courts the flowing poetic generalities of Helen's narrative. "Soon, but too late," Lionel is released from prison, and proceeds in a carriage from London to his home in the Welsh mountains near the coast, with the stamp of death already on him; and there, after a short time, he dies. Helen goes mad, is tended by Lionel's mother, and gives birth to a son. When she recovers her reason she learns for the first time that she is a mother, that Lionel's mother has died during her period of insanity, that Lionel has left great wealth to her by will, and that "the ready lies of law" have bereft her and her child of all. She commences an action to vindicate her legal rights; but what came of it is not recorded. Whatever the result of her lawsuit, Helen acquires a home with her little son on the banks of the Lake of Como, where Rosalind takes up her abode with her early friend. Eventually Rosalind's daughter is restored to her (we hear no more of her other two children) and grows up with Helen's son; and the young people are at last married, or rather, I should say, consecrated to each other, for we are not told whether in this respect they followed the orthodox traditions of Rosalind or the anti-matrimonial heresy of Lionel and Helen. Of the two friends Rosalind dies prematurely, while Helen lives to be old and dies among her relations.

Such in brief is the argument of *Rosalind and Helen*: I have set it down in commonplace terms in order to emphasize and bring home to our minds the fundamental conceptions which Shelley has embodied in so much poetry and overlaid with so much of his characteristic

propagandism that the mind is apt to dwell upon isolated passages rather than lay hold on the fable as a whole. No doubt the poet had good reasons for leading the attention of Peacock to the ideal side of the subject; but probably Peacock's wit was far too keenly edged for the real basis of the work to escape him, although he may perhaps not have discovered what Shelley may perhaps have been most anxious to have undiscovered, namely, that the relations of Rosalind and Helen were a reproduction of the relations of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and an early friend,—a reproduction highly idealized, be it conceded, but still a reproduction. Whatever Peacock may have known or divined on this subject, he can scarcely have failed to recognize his friend's delightful self-portraiture in Lionel,—one of the thinnest of the disguises in which Shelley has masked the essential characteristics of his own personality,—that personality which Peacock had himself been caricaturing as Scythrop in his charming book *Nightmare Abbey*, published in 1818. Nor is it likely that the author of *Nightmare Abbey*, when he read for Shelley the proof-sheets of *Rosalind and Helen* and recognized in Lionel the lineaments of which he had just given the world so different a representation in Scythrop, failed to observe in what particular popular agitation it was that Lionel figured as taking part. For here we have nothing more or less than an idealized record of the Reform agitation of 1816 and 1817, the fortunes of which we followed together on the 13th of April, 1887, when you were good enough to listen to my paper on the *Hermit of Marlow*. That very collapse of the democratic aspirations which Shelley witnessed in 1817 finds its appropriate place in *Rosalind and Helen*; and the final outrage of Lionel's imprisonment on a charge of blasphemy is precisely what Shelley was in constant risk of experiencing himself, and had been ever since his boyhood.

I have already referred to the basis of that part of the poem which deals especially with the relations between the two women whose names it bears; and I cannot better enlarge on this point than by quoting a passage from the second volume of Professor Dowden's

*Life of Shelley*, in which we read at pages 130 and 131 as follows :—

“It can hardly be doubted that the incidents and feelings portrayed were to some extent suggested to Shelley by Mary's relations with the friend of her girlhood, in the old Dundee days—Isabel Baxter. Since Mary's flight from her father's house in July, 1814, Isabel had fallen away from friendship. Now she was herself a wife, and rumours, probably false rumours, reached Mary that Isabel was not a happy wife. A visit of Isabel's father, William Baxter, to Marlow, in September, tended to draw the alienated friends once more together; and when it was proposed that Isabel Booth should be Mary's companion on the journey to Italy, she would gladly have acceded to the proposal. But David Booth, her husband, no ordinary man, had heard scandalous and lying tales of Shelley's life; his strong moral sense was shocked by the thought of danger to his wife's character or fame, and sternly yet tenderly he forbade a renewal of the intimacy. So by the Lake of Como there was no meeting, like that represented in the poem, of the sundered friends.”

Now although we must not for a moment mix up in our minds the stalwart-minded David Booth and the inconceivably despicable wretch whom Shelley has invented for a mate to Rosalind,—although, indeed, we may accept both Rosalind and her husband as ideal personalities created for the purpose of giving expression to Shelley's views on certain matters of personal conduct, still I think it probable that this episode in Mary's history not only “to some extent suggested” certain incidents, but was the predominating influence which drove Shelley to set about his eclogue. If so, the record just quoted is doubly interesting as establishing approximately the time of Shelley's first occupation with *Rosalind and Helen*. That the poem was begun at Marlow we know from Mrs. Shelley, but not whether early or late in 1817, or whether during the summer which was mainly devoted to *Laon and Cythna*. It was in September, as we learn from Professor Dowden, that *Laon and Cythna* was finished—the 23rd of September; and by the 26th Mrs. Shelley was already bewailing the enforced abandonment of the eclogue; so that, if the Baxter incidents of that month were the beginning of the scheme, he must have been working on both poems at once; for he left Marlow for London on the day of *Laon*

and *Cythna's* completion; and, while in London, he seems to have communicated to Mary an injunction of Abernethy's pupil, William Lawrence, "to cease from the exciting toil of composition, and to seek the benefits of rest and change of air."<sup>1</sup> On hearing this, Mary wrote to him, "It is well that your poem [meaning *Laon and Cythna*] was finished before this edict was issued against the imagination; but my pretty eclogue will suffer from it."<sup>2</sup> Whether the composition was resumed at Marlow in defiance of the edict, I do not know; but, if not, Shelley had already done enough of it to commit to the press; for, before finally quitting England on the 12th of March 1818, he had confided the poem, or a part of it, to his publisher, Mr. Ollier. This was probably the portion copied by Mary at Marlow as recorded in her diary under date the 19th of February 1818; and the original manuscript most likely went to Italy with them. Perhaps, when the poem was completed in August 1818 at the Baths of Lucca, and Shelley wrote to Peacock as if Mary had just then copied it all out, he had so far altered the original scheme as to make a fresh copy of the whole necessary.

I have already deprecated the confusion of David Booth with Rosalind's husband as depicted by Shelley; but we must now look a little more closely at the Baxter-Booth circle, as we find it delineated in Professor Dowden's *Life of Shelley*. In the house of William Baxter at Dundee, Mary had, it seems, "spent some of the happiest months of her girlhood," finding "close and dear companions" in his daughters, Christy and Isabel; but, although Baxter was a man of such liberal views as to merit and incur expulsion from the sect of Glassites which his forefathers had helped to establish at Dundee, and although, to boot, he was Godwin's ardent admirer as well as his friend, Isabel's friendship was withdrawn on Mary's flight with Shelley in 1814. David Booth, to whom Isabel was led to ally herself in a union far more strange though more orthodox, was many years older than her father, "a self-educated man of vigorous intellect, imperious will, and disposition impe-

<sup>1</sup> Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii., p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

riously kind, . . . not five feet high, very dark of hue, with eyes red and watery, and something of the imp, if not the fiend, in his look." It seems he was a brewer and afterwards a schoolmaster, recognized in and about Newburgh as "a person of stupendous learning and mysterious power." He "was in principles a republican." and it was "whispered that he had sold himself to the devil for learning." If it was also whispered, as we have seen, that the young girl who had surrendered her life into the keeping of this elderly curiosity was not a happy wife, the whisperers had certainly some show of reason on their side; and at all events, when Baxter had found out how unaltered Mary was by her union with Shelley, which by the by was now duly conventionalized, and how entirely amiable, frugal in personal habits, benevolent, and delicately considerate of others, was the man of genius to whom she had given herself,—when the sometime Glassite of Dundee had told all this to his daughter, her devotion to her brewer was not so enthralling but that she would gladly have "made it up" with Mary and accompanied the Shelleys to Italy. But David Booth said "No." In November 1817, both Booth and Baxter spent an evening with the Shelleys in London; and before the close of the year the sturdy little brewer, whether seeing in the attractions of that charming society an element of danger to his wife's peace and his own, or finding Shelley's views in morals and politics really too wide for even his republican swallow, over-ruled the tolerant impulsiveness of his too facile, not to say frisky, young father-in-law (Baxter was a little over forty), and decreed eternal separation. The verdict was communicated to Shelley by Baxter; and the poet took the close of the episode in such a serious, frank, and dignified spirit that I cannot resist reading you his letter to Baxter on the subject, more especially as it contains some backward glimpses, useful for our purpose. This is the letter<sup>1</sup> :—

"Marlow, December 30, 1817.

"MY DEAR SIR,

Your candid explanation is very welcome to me, as it relieves me from a weight of uncertainty, and is consistent with my

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<sup>1</sup> Dowden's *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii., pp. 175-8.

own mode of treating those who honour me with their friendship—which is, either to maintain with them a free and unsuspicious intercourse, or explicitly to state to them my motives for interrupting or circumscribing it, so soon as they arise within my own mind.

"I understand by your letter that you decline, in the name of your family, an intercourse which I believe had its sole foundation in the intimacy of Isabel and Mary. This intercourse entirely originated in an unsolicited advance on their part;<sup>1</sup> a change in their opinions and feelings produced it then, and now concludes it. Mary renewed with pleasure the friendship of her early years. I considered her friends as mine, and found much satisfaction, distinct from that duty, in discovering in you, the first of the new circle to whom I was introduced, a man of virtue and talent with whose feelings and opinions I perpetually found occasions of sympathy. To me, a secluded valetudinarian, all this was quite an event. Mary for three whole years had been lamenting the loss of her friend, and was made miserable and indignant that her friendship had been sacrificed to opinions which she supposed had already received their condemnation in the mind of every enlightened reasoner on moral science. Young and ardent spirits confound theory and practice. I saw that all this was in the natural order of things, and it is neither my habit to feel indignation or disappointment at the inconsistencies of mankind. People who had one atom of pride or resentment for injury or neglect would have refused the renewal of an intimacy which had already been once dissolved on a plea, in their conception, to the last degree unworthy and erroneous. I thus see your determination to deprive Mary of the intercourse of her friend, and most highly respect the motives, as I know they must exist in your mind, for this proceeding. May I ask *precisely what* those motives are? You do not distinctly say, but only allude to certain free opinions which I hold, inconsistent with yours. We had a good deal of discussion about all sorts of opinions, and I thought we agreed on all—except matters of taste; and I don't think any serious consequences ought to flow from a controversy whether Wordsworth or Campbell be the greater poet. Yet I would not be misapprehended. Though I have not a spark of pride or resentment in this matter, I disdain to say a word that should tend to *persuade* you to change your decision. On any such change you know where to find a man constant and sincere in his predilections. But all I now want is to know the plain truth.

"Mr. Booth is no doubt a man of great intellectual acuteness and consummate skill in the exercise of logic. I never met with a man by whom, in the short time we exchanged ideas, I felt myself excited to so much severe and sustained mental competition, or from whom I derived so much amusement and instruction. It

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<sup>1</sup> "Consequent," says Professor Dowden, "on Godwin's informing Mr. Baxter in May of the fact of Shelley's marriage, celebrated in December, 1816."

would have given me much pleasure to have cultivated his acquaintance. But I know that this desire could not be reciprocal. Nor is it difficult to apprehend the cause of this distinction. Am I not right in my conjecture in attributing to Mr. Booth the change in your sentiment announced in your letter? His keen and subtle mind, deficient in those elementary feelings which are the *principles* of all moral reasoning, is better fitted for the detection of error than the establishment of truth, and his pleadings, urged or withdrawn with sceptical caution and indifference, may be employed with almost equal force as an instrument of fair argument or sophistry. In matters of abstract speculation we can readily recur to the first principles on which our opinions rest, and thus confute a sophism or derive instruction from an argument. But in the complicated relations of private life, it is a practice difficult, dangerous, and rare to appeal to an elementary principle; the motives of the sophist are many and secret; the resources of his ingenuity as numerous as the relations respecting which it is exercised. Mr. Booth's reasonings *may* be right; they *may* be sincere; he *may* be conscientiously impressed with views widely differing from mine. But be frank with me, my dear sir; is it not Mr. Booth who has persuaded you to see things in this way since your last visit, when no such considerations as you allege in your letter were present to your thoughts? The only motive that suggests this question is an unwillingness to submit to the having my intimacies made the sport of secret and unacknowledged manœuvres.

"I need not say that your expressions of kindness and service are flattering to me, and that I can say with great truth that I should consider myself honoured if at any time it were possible that you would make the limited power which I possess a source of utility to you.

"My dear Sir,

"Yours most sincerely,

"P. B. SHELLEY."

To this delightful letter Mary added the following pretty postscript :—

"MY DEAR SIR,

"You see I prophesied well three months ago, when you were here. I then said that I was sure that Mr. Booth was averse to our intercourse, and would find some means to break it off. I wish I had you by the fire here in my little study, and it might be 'double, double, toil and trouble,' but I could quickly convince you that your girls are not below me in station, and that in fact I am the fittest companion for them in the world; but I postpone the argument until I see you, for I know (pardon me) that *viva voce* is all in all with you."

Baxter, it seems, showed the letter to Booth, who wrote to Shelley<sup>1</sup> :—

“You have amused yourself in sketching the characters of Mr. Baxter and me. They are composition pictures, and as a pair of portraits form together a ludicrous, mystical Duality, combining the abstract principles of good and of evil—of Divinity and of Demon.”

It is regretworthy that we have not the whole composition before us, but it seems to have ended thus :—

“I have only to add that Mr. Baxter’s (to which yours now before me is an answer) was written and sent off without having been shown to me. I certainly should not have suggested any expressions which could have called forth remarks about rank or station. In these I never would acknowledge inferiority, and at all events they have nothing to do with the present question.”

Shelley saw Baxter again on the 2nd of March, when preparing for his journey to the Continent ; but, although Isabel Booth was in London at the time, no communication took place between her and Mary. It appears that the latest expressions from the Shelleys to the Baxters were of the sincerest good-will and solicitude.

We all know that, although Shelley, urged by motives more or less unselfish, was three times married, twice to Harriet and once to Mary, he was an ardent disbeliever in the institution of marriage, in which he saw an instrument of tyranny and oppression. We all know how eagerly he desired to see reform in the marriage laws and in the views of society concerning the relations of the sexes. We have seen in his letter to Baxter—who, by the bye, told Mary,<sup>2</sup> he thought the anti-matrimonial *Queen Mab* “the best poem of modern days”—that Mary had lamented for three years the rupture of her friendship with Isabel and had been made miserable and indignant by the sacrifice of that friendship to a matter of opinion practically concerning the institution of marriage. In David Booth, Shelley evidently saw a man prone to tyrannize over those with whom he came in contact, and it is clear that he respected the little brewer’s intellect more than his heart. And yet he saw

<sup>1</sup> Dowden’s *Life of Shelley*, vol. ii., p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 144.

this young girl indissolubly bound to David Booth—destined to pass her life in the society and under the tutelage of a man, to say the least, unengaging—a man under whose dictatorship she and her family were deprived of all communication with a dear friend of her own sex and years. This to Shelley would naturally seem the most intolerable tyranny ; and no wonder that he was stirred to read the world a fresh homily on this text, concerning marriage and free union. No wonder that one of the heroines of his next poem should address the other thus on meeting her beside the Lake of Como :—

“None doth behold us now : the power  
That led us forth at this lone hour  
Will be but ill requited  
If thou depart in scorn : oh ! come,  
And talk of our abandoned home.  
Remember, this is Italy,  
And we are exiles. Talk with me  
Of that our land, whose wilds and floods,  
Barren and dark although they be,  
Were dearer than these chestnut woods :  
Those heathy paths, that inland stream,  
And the blue mountains, shapes which seem  
Like wrecks of childhood’s sunny dream :  
Which that we have abandoned now,  
Weighs on the heart like that remorse  
Which altered friendship leaves. I seek  
No more our youthful intercourse.  
That cannot be ! Rosalind, speak,  
Speak to me. Leave me not.—When morn did come,  
When evening fell upon our common home,  
When for one hour we parted,—do not frown :  
I would not chide thee, though thy faith is broken :  
But turn to me. Oh ! by this cherished token,  
Of woven hair, which thou wilt not disown,  
Turn, as ’twere but the memory of me,  
And not my scorned self who prayed to thee.”

Nor is it to be wondered at that, in reading his homily on the tyranny of wedlock, Shelley should so far have idealized the conception of a tyrant husband as to endow him liberally with the meanest vices.

“He was a man  
Hard, selfish, loving only gold,  
Yet full of guile : his pale eyes ran

With tears, which each some falsehood told,  
 And oft his smooth and bridled tongue  
 Would give the lie to his flushing cheek :  
 He was a coward to the strong :  
 He was a tyrant to the weak,  
 On whom his vengeance he would wreak :  
 For scorn, whose arrows search the heart,  
 From many a stranger's eye would dart,  
 And on his memory cling, and follow  
 His soul to its home so cold and hollow.

\* \* \* \* \*

He died :

I know not how : he was not old,  
 If age be numbered by its years :  
 But he was bowed and bent with fears,  
 Pale with the quenchless thirst of gold,  
 Which, like fierce fever, left him weak ;  
 And his strait lip and bloated cheek  
 Were warped in spasms by hollow sneers ;  
 And selfish cares with barren plough,  
 Not age, had lined his narrow brow,  
 And foul and cruel thoughts, which feed  
 Upon the withering life within,  
 Like vipers on some poisonous weed.  
 Whether his ill were death or sin  
 None knew, until he died indeed,  
 And then men owned they were the same."

Rosalind's separation from her children under her dead husband's will is, of course, the reflexion of Shelley's separation from his children through the action of their dead mother's relations ; and, as in the Chancery suit of these people the argument had been used that Shelley's views of marriage led to immorality according to the legal standard of morals, it was a natural relief to the outraged father to emphasize in his fiction the moral evils of marriage without love : certainly he leads the reader's sympathies with great delicacy and dexterity to the side of Helen, who trusted herself and her happiness unreservedly to Lionel because she loved him, rather than to Rosalind, who sold herself body and soul to one whom she not only did not love but whom she absolutely contemned and loathed. Her price was food, lodging, and respectability for herself and her mother. Her mother soon died ; her husband, from his "putrid shroud" as Shelley says, lyingly denied her respectability ; and when his death had shaken her free from

what she described as "those abhorred embraces," she underwent the frightful experience of reading in her involuntary and irrepressible joy at his death, the condemnation of her own dutifully ordered life.

Rosalind's story is indeed far from a pleasant or even an interesting one; and it is in Helen's that we find the agreeable side of the poem. Devoted to the memory of Lionel, she gives her friend an enthusiastic account of his genius and amiable qualities; and that account is, as I have said, full of the personality of Shelley and his views upon reform. It tells of the time

"When liberty's dear pæan fell  
'Mid murderous howls. To Lionel,  
Though of great wealth and lineage high,  
Yet through those dungeon walls there came  
Thy thrilling light, O liberty!  
And as the meteor's midnight flame  
Startles the dreamer, sun-like truth  
Flashed on his visionary youth,  
And filled him, not with love, but faith,  
And hope, and courage . . ."

The restless and reckless propagandism of Lionel is clearly Shelley's own experience but slightly idealized, and the account of the wonder it inspired in commonplace minds might have been translated from the prose of some commentators on Shelley's doings as a reform agitator:

"Men wondered, and some sneered to see  
One sow what he could never reap:  
For he is rich, they said, and young,  
And might drink from the depths of luxury.  
If he seeks fame, fame never crowned  
The champion of a trampled creed:  
If he seeks power, power is enthroned  
'Mid antient rights and wrongs, to feed  
Which hungry wolves with praise and spoil,  
Those who would sit near power must toil;  
And such, there sitting, all may see.  
What seeks he? All that others seek  
He casts away, like a vile weed  
Which the sea casts unreturningly.  
That poor and hungry men should break  
The laws which wreak them toil and scorn  
We understand; but Lionel  
We know is rich and nobly born."

Then the account of the "wild and queer" verses about "devils and saints and all such gear," which he aimed against the priests and so incurred their hatred, is very suggestive of foundation in fact; and if the following passage had occurred in a poem headed, "England in 1817-18," who would have wondered?

"Grey Power was seated  
Safely on her ancestral throne;  
And Faith, the Python, undefeated,  
Even to its blood-stained steps dragged on  
Her foul and wounded train, and men  
Were trampled and deceived again,  
And words and shews again could bind  
The wailing tribes of human kind  
In scorn and famine."

If we had met the next few lines in prose in Mary's journal for 1814 we should scarcely have been surprised:—

"Then he would bid me not to weep,  
And say with flattery false, yet sweet,  
That death and he could never meet,  
If I would never part with him.  
And so we loved, and did unite  
All that in us was yet divided:  
For when he said, that many a rite,  
By men to bind but once provided,  
Could not be shared by him and me,  
Or they would kill him in their glee,  
I shuddered, and then laughing said—  
'We will have rites our faith to bind,  
But our church shall be the starry night,  
Our altar the grassy earth outspread,  
And our priest the muttering wind.'"

And a page or two further on we emerge with certainty into the region of the actual in a curious way enough; for when Lionel has been taken for sedition and blasphemy, as Shelley was quite prepared to be, he cries to Helen as she is driven forth from the prison she would fain share with him:

"Fear not the tyrants shall rule for ever,  
Or the priests of the bloody faith;  
They stand on the brink of that mighty river,  
Whose waves they have tainted with death:

It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells,  
 Around them it foams, and rages, and swells,  
 And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,  
 Like wrecks in the surge of eternity."

This stanza is really one of six addressed by Shelley to his infant son William, between the time of the Lord Chancellor's decree depriving him of the custody of Harriett's children and the time of the final departure for Italy—I should say in March 1818; for there are allusions to the sea and the boat in other stanzas which make it probable the poem was composed on the rough passage in the boat *Lady Castlereagh* that carried Shelley and his family from Dover to Calais, and written down perhaps at the end of that stormy voyage. When Mrs. Shelley printed the verses to William in 1839, she gave the second line with the epithet *evil* instead of *bloody*—a change which leaves the verse, if more polite, still less forcible and characteristic; but the words are for the rest practically identical. It would be interesting to know whether, when Shelley addressed his son on the subject of their flight from England, he repeated the eight lines from a part of his eclogue already completed, or whether, when he revised the eclogue in Italy, he was tempted to insert in it this very appropriate stanza of his little poem. I lean to the latter supposition; but know of no external evidence on the subject.

Ladies and gentlemen, I will not trespass further on your patience by elaborating the evidence of what perhaps no one will be disposed to dispute, that the motives of this poem of *Rosalind and Helen* are before all things personal and homiletic; nor will I weary you with a long analysis of the faults of execution which show how feeble was the hold the story, as a story, had on Shelley's imagination. The principal flaws are inconsistencies in the narrative of *Rosalind*, which is precisely where we should expect the interest of Shelley in his own creation to relax, seeing that her character was just such as he would be most likely to condemn. Hence it is no great marvel that *Rosalind*, the mother of three children, who at one point speaks of her two wild boys as cowering fearfully near her knee while the babe at her bosom was hushed with fear at its father's approach, thus making

the girl the youngest, should so far forget herself in the sequel as to mention her daughter as the first born. Similarly we do not think much of her inconsistency when, after promising Helen to tell her the truth, she first says she watched her husband's unlamented tomb morning and evening, and would not depart from it, while her children "laughed aloud in frantic glee," and afterwards affirms that she went away from the place immediately after the reading of the will without even noticing her children. But if Rosalind and her story had had for Shelley an interest other than didactic these things would probably have been obvious to him. These flaws, such as they are, are left upon the poem for all time, for it was Shelley's will not to bring his work to perfection. To the few errors in the sense which Peacock's unsympathetic revision of the proofs failed to detect, and which gave Shelley some small concern, we may yet hope at some time or other to see justice done; for it would be strange if the original manuscript and Mrs. Shelley's copy had both disappeared for ever: meanwhile it is useless to speculate as to which particular passages were thus corrupted. Rather let us congratulate ourselves that the noble close of the poem is free from corruption and that most of the many flashes of self-revelation which Shelley vouchsafed us in the portraiture of Lionel are unimpaired by their passage through the press.

You all know that memorable stanza of the Poet Laureate's—

"The poet in a golden clime was born,  
     With golden stars above;  
 Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,  
     The love of love."

Well, apart from the golden clime, I know of no one to whom that stanza applies so perfectly as to Shelley; and of all the fictitious characters in his poetry which serve to bring his own personality before us in various phases and modifications,—Laon, Athanase, the poet in *Alastor*, Lionel,—I think the one that renders most of the essential spirit of Shelley is the hero of the work we have met to consider this evening. Therefore I would close these somewhat disjointed remarks by reminding you how

applicable to Shelley are these words that Shelley said of Lionel :—

“love and life in him were twins,  
Born at one birth : in every other  
First life then love its course begins,  
Though they be children of one mother ;  
And so through this dark world they fleet  
Divided, till in death they meet :  
But he loved all things ever.”

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